



# Washington State Department of Agriculture News Release

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Contact: Dr. Robert Mead (360) 902-1878  
Dr. Kathy Connell (360) 902-1835  
Linda Waring (360) 902-1815

WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE  
P.O. Box 42560, Olympia, Washington 98504-2560

## **Washington bird owners urged to report signs of disease**

OLYMPIA — In response to the outbreak of Exotic Newcastle Disease in California, the state Department of Agriculture (WSDA) asks that shipments of game fowl from California or Mexico be reported to the state veterinarian's office at (360) 902-1878 or the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) at (360) 753-9430. Dr. Robert Mead, state veterinarian, also reminds bird owners to protect their birds from disease, and asks owners to report signs of illness among birds, such as sneezing, coughing, nasal discharge, diarrhea, listlessness, or sudden death.

"We want to test the birds to ensure that they do not carry disease," says Dr. Mead. "Sick or dead birds must be tested to confirm Exotic Newcastle Disease because signs of the virus mimic other bird diseases." State or federal veterinarians will work with private veterinarians at no charge to the owner to collect samples for testing.

Exotic Newcastle Disease does not pose a human health threat and does not affect the safety of poultry and egg products. It has not been detected in Washington. However, it is one of the most infectious diseases of poultry in the world. It affects all species of birds and it is so virulent that many birds die without showing any clinical signs. A death rate of almost 100 percent can occur in unvaccinated poultry flocks. It can infect and kill even vaccinated poultry.

Birds may catch the virus through contact with infected birds or contaminated materials, such as the clothing or shoes of humans who have been exposed to infected birds.

In California, agriculture officials have battled the disease in backyard flocks for the last three months. However, last week, they confirmed the virus in four commercial egg-laying facilities. And, Dr. Mead warns that game fowl tend to move within states and between states outside of the normal animal movement safeguards and without regard to animal health requirements.

To protect birds from disease, disinfect footwear prior to entering or leaving a poultry facility and wear disposable coveralls or put on clean clothes prior to entering a poultry site. Producers can also disinfect tires on vehicles, and monitor visitors such as feed providers, service personnel and poultry buyers to ensure they are following disinfecting procedures. Anyone in contact with backyard poultry or game fowl flocks should shower and change clothes before coming into contact with commercial poultry.

For information, visit WSDA's Web site at <http://agr.wa.gov/FoodAnimal/AnimalHealth/ENDdefault.htm> or  
USDA's Web site at <http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/enc/exoticnc.html>.